

The Wine Steward's

THE RED COLLECTOR

WINE CLUB

November 2018

Big, not Brainless

2016 LEVIATHAN – California

Following somewhat in the footsteps of last month's Petit Batard comes a wine forsaking a varietal designation such as "Cabernet Sauvignon." It also avoids a specific geographic designation.

Instead, Leviathan benefits from ***diversification***.

Former winemaker of Screaming Eagle Andy Erickson thought up this project, a wine combining several great grape varieties and accessing different great wine places. The broad "California" designation is necessary because of this. Fourteen years after its inception the people at Leviathan like to keep their options open.

We can't tell you precisely where the wine's from but we can say that Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah, Merlot, and Cabernet Franc all have a hand in it. So, we leave it to your educated palates to realize that there is NO sub-par fruit happening here, based on:

Color: Intense with connotations of black licorice and purple fudge, if there's such a thing.

Nose: Sweet graphite, espresso, grilled toast, blackcurrant, and a whole lot more WOW. Two days later the wine remains healthy, but now adds a fragrant meatiness to the picture.

Texture: MOUTHCOATING, especially with some airing out / decanting. Endearing cocoa tannins keep your tongue attentive.

Flavor: Dark, dark fruit, sweet smoke, and roasted herbs.

Leviathan is ready to drink with a little decanting and a lot of juicy ribeye steak. I think it could also enjoy a five year stay in your cellar!

41.99 / 37.79 for wine club members



Vailia

Cab from Another Place Should Have Another Flavor!

2016 DESPARADA ‘Sackcloth & Ashes’ – California

The label for this wine doesn’t declare “Cabernet Sauvignon” because there’s 65% of that grape represented here and to name a wine varietally (in California) you must use at least 75%. That said, we’ll think of this as Cabernet and thereby launch a chat. Topic? “What is Cabernet supposed to taste like?”

Lots of things. The one prevalent and consistent feature is color. Cabernet Sauvignon should have it in spades, in a deep ruby way. Then come the variations as you survey the globe and its myriad Cabernet settlements. Bordeaux will bring all kinds of savory aspects to the nose and palate. Fruit can happen there too, but a main feature of Cabernet-based, Left Bank Bordeaux red is graphite or lead pencil. Closer to home in Sonoma and honing-in on the Alexander Valley, dirt clod earthiness brings an extra dimension to the cherry fruit. Now for Napa: Well, WHERE in Napa? Certainly, myriad uncorkings have revealed differences between Oakville, Coombsville, Rutherford, Calistoga, and Coombsville. Obviously, fruit grown on the valley floor will behave differently than that grown on the slopes of the eastern or western “mountain” chains. All of that considered, maybe Napa sums up our local perspective on what’s good about Cabernet. Black or red fruit with varying amounts of dust or mountain-derived grip . . . or valley-borne dust . . . and a possibility of dried herbs, olives, cedar . . .

The point is, Cabernet has lots of scent and flavor manifestations, and this month we’re paying a rare visit to a completely different and newer Cab place, California’s Central Coast. The sun shines at a different angle here. The dirt is different. And, just as importantly, so is the more youthful and adventurous winemaking attitude. Would a blend of 65% Cabernet Sauvignon, 18% Petit Verdot, 10% Cabernet Franc, 5% Malbec, and 2% GRENACHE happen anywhere else? Probably not. The Central Coast, with its great possibilities for Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, Rhone varieties, and virtually every other wine type, automatically promotes *joie de vivre* and devil-may-care wine styles.

Desparada happily complies – or deviates, depending on your perspective. Made by Desparada proprietress Vailia From, this “Cabernet” cries “FRUIT!” to the nose. FRESH FRUIT. Think about freshly-crushed blackberries about to be rendered into jam. A deep draw from that pre-heated pot gives you a rooty-black earthiness along with the nearly-tropical berry fruit smells. In the mouth the youthful fruit message continues, and a restraining tannic element of freshly-tilled, still-wet black clay provides the framework of “importance”. This wine has fun AND guts!

We hope your openminded-ness toward a familiar varietal from a less-traditional place allows a respectful appreciation for this thoughtfully-made small-production wine from our friend Vailia!

42.99 / 38.69 for All Wine Club Members

The Wine Steward's

World Class

WINE CLUB

November 2018

The Longer Love

2014 KEERMONT CABERNET SAUVIGNON – Stellenbosch, South Africa

83 days ago a sample of this wine arrived in the mail. It was among several other bottles from here and there, and the wholesale prices for these prospective Wine Steward buys were similarly all over the map. When I get such a “care package” I have to make a fast judgement in order to report back on the whole batch – which worked and which didn't – for efficiency's sake. This South African Cabernet said enough to have me make a commitment – and then forget about it for months.

Then the delivery came – all those cases for your club – and 21 days ago I opened my second bottle of Keermont Cabernet. Knowing all I knew – that I'd liked it enough to commit on your behalf, that the priced was right, yada yada yada – I paused at my second first impression: The wine was suave, sultry, mellow, and satisfying – but it didn't YELL. Fragrances of cedar, plum preserves, and salted beef gave way to a placid palate feel energetic with acid and medium in size. I wasn't necessarily underwhelmed but did start to feel a little insecure about my choice.

Then I visited the same bottle the next morning. It was good, maybe better. – And the next morning: It was good, and maybe even better. – AND THE NEXT MORNING: Enduring goodness and growing complexity; unhurried improvement!

What does that tell me about this 100% varietal, first-ever Cabernet Sauvignon from a great small (300 cases of this were made) South African producer? It tells me to calm down and relax; that some wines happen more slowly yet more enduringly.

This is a wine, in and of itself, to follow with a longer period of inquiry. Because of that it's also a wine in no hurry to rise to its best then just as quickly fall off a cliff. This savory Cab with flowing red fruits and citric lift is a classic; an ageless Audrey Hepburn; a 30-year-old Ford pickup; a Nation's hamburger. – Actually, that last thing might just play along!

41.99 / 37.79 for all wine club members



Costa Nova
Wines

Al Huezo, one of the Movers and Shakers of Costa Nova Wines

Finally

2014 ANDREZA 'Grande Reserva' – Douro, Portugal

Barely two months ago we were visited by not one but FOUR of the players involved with Costa Nova Wines, a fairly new importer of Portuguese wines. I'd agreed to the appointment based on friendships, and not with a high amount of optimism. Our exposure to Portuguese wines has been sporadic at best; a vendor might erupt from out of nowhere with a new Portuguese portfolio only to never appear at our bar for a follow-up tasting. If a vendor ever did visit with a broad lineup of selections the label designs would invariably be badly designed or – more critically – the wines themselves wouldn't work. Historically, too many offerings from Portugal sacrificed gratification for stoic sturdiness. Shiny high acids and grim earthy tannins would overwhelm the lower amount of fruit. These were wines in disagreement to my palate, and to those of most of my customers. How, then, was someone brand new to the game going to do better?

As bottle after bottle emerged from their bags one criteria was automatically met. The packaging looked good; legible and dignified. Then came the tasting, and wine after wine surpassed my expectations with a styling that combined truth of place with an “olive branch” of consumer-satisfying fruit. The pricing was also more than fair per the deliveries of the respective offerings. As for the hope for continuing the relationship, several things have already happened to encourage my outlook for the wines of Costa Nova Imports. After visit #1, Al and his troupe were back within two weeks to show me even more wines. Soon thereafter, they personally launched our new line of Portuguese wines at our WineBar. Pleased to have us as their very first retail outlet, they've promised to keep us abreast of new vintages and wine types as they arrive from Portugal, and we've already enjoyed being “exclusive” with a product or two.

THIS Grande Reserva is such an example. While we won't be the only ones to have it once more of it arrives from across The Pond, right now we are. You lucky club members are essentially the first Californians to see Adreza Grande Reserva. This blend comes from the land of Port, from varieties often used in port production: 40% Touriga Nacional, 40% Touriga Franca, and 20% Sousão. Rated 91 points by both Wine Enthusiast and Robert Parker's Wine Advocate, Andreza is an example of a great wine transcending the difficulties of a tricky vintage. Not all Europeans could achieve such goodness in 2014. To my nose there is a deep fragrance of citrus oil, blackberries, violets, and fresh-roasted coffee. The mouth is graceful with florality yet proportionally structured with acids and tannins attesting to the mineral content of the Douro River's steep, terraced riverbanks. This is a long-awaited success to be celebrated with rich stews, grilled meats, or hard cheeses.

28.99 / 26.09 for all wine club members

The Wine Steward's

California Wine Lover's

WINE CLUB

November 2018

The New World Standard of an Old World Wine Type

2016 BECKMEN 'Cuvée Le Bec' – Santa Ynez Valley, Santa Barbara County

This is at least the FOURTH time we have clubbed this wine. What keeps reviving our admiration of 'Le Bec' and its application to your attention? This wine, my friends, says exactly what it should say, per type and source.

Beckmen is located just east of the town of Los Olivos. Some of its estate vineyards surround the winery, while more of its acreage happens west of town in the Ballard Canyon sub-appellation of Santa Barbara County. Cabernet Sauvignon and Sauvignon Blanc happen on the Beckmen menu, but the real emphasis here is on Rhone-inspired reds, whites, and dry pinks. To be so inclined is to – hopefully – embrace the grapegrowing and winemaking practices that will honor that specific theme. In most situations, Rhone varieties such as Grenache, Syrah, and Mourvèdre don't need or appreciate the application of new oak. Instead, the preservation of their inherent, exuberant FRUIT is the respectful winemaker's mandate. Why muddle that up with wood?!

Let's look over our shoulders toward Beckmen's muse, the Rhone Valley of France. The no- or low-oak, fruit-capturing wine culture has existed there for decades if not centuries. Preserving the chirpily charming fruit of – especially – Grenache was valued and implemented by aging it in swimming pool quantities. Aging in volume slows the deterioration of fruit. And what was the aging container? More often than not, mundanely, a concrete vat lined with food grade fiberglass. Volume and impermeable materials are the better bet that the consumer will find raspberries, strawberries, boysenberries, and cherries in his or her wine, rather than oxidation-derived prunes and leather.

Beckmen honors this style of winemaking year after year. If their Rhone-inspired wines see oak at all the barrels will be larger in volume and older (more neutrally-flavored) in age. Grenache, Syrah, Mourvèdre, and Cunoise are thus preserved for your appreciation. A screwcap seals the deal. Fruit is captured, preserved, encapsulated. – and that means you can enjoy this on Day 1, 2, and 3 based on my research!

20.99 / 18.89 for Wine Club Members

“Pssst! Wanna know where it’s from?”

2016 REQUIEM CABERNET SAUVIGNON – Columbia Valley, Washington State

Beyond just handing you a bottle to enjoy we like to elaborate *via* these notes. The more informed you are about our selections the more ‘calibrated’ you’ll be as you approach them. You’ll have a better sense of anticipation. You’ll look up recipes for the proper accompaniment. You’ll uncork the bottle for the most appreciative group. You’ll come back to buy more ... Well, I can always dream!

What can get in the way of giving you the scoop is a wine such as Requiem. Certainly, I can repeat all I’ve said before about Washington State in general: Its silty / loess soil derived from the Missoula floods of the last ice age. Its latitude comparable to Bordeaux affording it a longer summer day, thought to improve a grape’s chances of correctly ripening. Its high desert situation provided with (sometimes) no more than six inches of rainfall in a year. Its complex aqueduct system affording the local farmer the ability to water when the vines need it most. Its grape-preferring attribute of “diurnal shift,” the larger difference between warm daytime and cool nighttime temperatures. – Did we just cover all the Washington State wine basics all over again? They’re certainly worth repeating!

But what of Requiem Cabernet specifically? There’s little to say, and that’s on purpose. If we told you who made it and what vineyards provided the fruit we’d have to kill you. Kidding aside, this is one of those wine projects where someone got a steal of a deal on premium grapes based on the agreement that the sources would not be divulged. To say that a particular world class vineyard usually yielding trophy wines also produced this value version would be to steal thunder, to harm the high-end brand. Oh well, if we can’t know all the data we can apply our senses!

This Cabernet - with just a bit of airing - is very expressive with Washington’s signature loamy-ness, pepper, herb, coffee, and cherry fruit spectrum of scents. The palate is easy in it flowing fruit, yet a blood orange citricity maintains its energy. Not unlike good Argentine Malbecs, this Washington State Cabernet both pleases and causes tongue-twitching anxiety, best resolved with beef. Take that concept and run with it!

By the way, we actually do know TWO of the vineyard sources involved in Requiem. One begins with an ‘L’ and the other starts with ‘Q’. That’s all we can say unless – of course – you don’t mind being killed.

19.99 / 17.99 for all wine club members

The Wine Steward's

Wine Adventurer

WINE CLUB

November 2018

For Thanksgiving, Employ FRAGRANT, RED Fruit
2015 SILVIO NARDI – Rosso di Montalcino, Tuscany, Italy

Wine needn't always be purple. Wine needn't always be alcoholically fat, i.e. "cocktail style." Instead, it can take a step back from color and body and thereby work more harmoniously with a meal. There's a holiday coming, perhaps the most important "food event" of our American calendar, when families and friends thankfully gather and – invariably - EAT. As I write we are entering my favorite week of the year from a wine steward's perspective, because the prevalent conversation on the sales floor involves what works best with food, particularly Thanksgiving Dinner. Augmenting that conversation: This month's two club wines chosen particularly for Turkey Day.

Rosso di Montalcino from Tuscany must be made entirely of Sangiovese, based on the local wine laws. This little brother to famous (and pricier) Brunello di Montalcino is released younger for early consumption and with lower expectations for wine greatness. All we ask from Rosso is cherry and flower perfume, brightness of acidity, and – hopefully – a delicate sense of red fruit syrup. That happens in this oh-so-authentic example from Brunello maker Silvio Nardi, awarded 91 points by Tuscan wine fan James Suckling.

Have a look at the wine in your glass. Transparent orange-redness prevails. That means you should start sniffing as if this is a Pinot Noir. Potpourri, strawberries, and cherries reward your inquiry. Now a taste: There is anxiety of acidity coupled with a coy richness of red fruits. Now, EAT SOMETHING WITH THIS. After all, that's the primary idea behind honest Sangiovese.

As a food pairing, may we suggest Thanksgiving Dinner?!

21.99 / 19.79 for all wine club members



The Theme of Delicate Redness Continues

2016 J. HOFSTATTER VERNATSCH / SCHIAVA – Sudtirolo- Alto Adige, Italy

Yep, you can call this varietal “Vernatsch” or “Schiava” or even “Trollinger,” Germany’s name for it. I prefer “Schiava” since it’s the first of these names I’d heard, and it’s fun to say once you know how:

“Skee-AHH-vah!”

This grape has been grown in northern Italy’s scenic Dolomites since the thirteenth century, as records attest. It’s taken until THIS century for most of you to ever hear of it. Why the lack of fame? This cool climate red doesn’t impress with color or body. Instead, Schiava is a careless comment of chirpy fruit, smoke, and briskness of palate feel. Its punchy style appreciates a slight chilling (or pour it straight from your temperature-controlled cellar). Its vivacious nerve makes it wonderful with charcuterie. The “snap” of the wine loves salumi’s fatty cushioning.

... And we think it’s a shoo-in for Thanksgiving dinner. Consider the effect of cranberries, also sure to be represented on your crowded table. Cranberries aren’t necessarily entirely sweet nor simply fruity, but also apply an energetic bitterness to your soon-to-be-sated palate. Cranberries, like this wine, are meant to jar your mouth awake and keep you chowing down just a little longer. A big Napa Cabernet, however gratuitous, would have a very opposite effect. A good Schiava delays that snooze on the couch just a little longer, which the hardworking Thanksgiving chef would probably appreciate!

Happy Holidays ... and here’s to happy, lighthearted wines you’ve never heard of before!

18.99 / 17.09 for all wine club members

The Wine Steward's

Here n There Whites

WINE CLUB

November 2018

Its first visit to California!

2017 BURGO VIEJO BLANCO– Rioja, Spain

FACTS and **THOUGHTS**, plainly put:

Rioja, Spain is that country's "Napa Valley" and best known for its red wines. White wine, accounting for a tiny percentage of the total production, has been but a locally-consumed afterthought until recently.

White Rioja is usually made of Viura, otherwise known as Macabeo. This low acid grape furnishes body but generally lacks acidic nerve.

THIS White Rioja is 60% Viura and 40% Tempranillo Blanco, a mutation of the red Tempranillo only lately identified. A mere 2,000 cases were made for the world and it was done without oak aging. Instead, it rested for a few months in stainless steel tanks and saw occasional visits from the winemaker for a *batonnage* treatment. "Batonnage" is the texture-enhancing practice of stirring the settled lees (expired yeast cells) back into the wine above.

Based on the two varieties at play and the application of lees-stirring this wine implies the generosity of a Chardonnay without the vanilla flavors of oak. I smell waxflowers. I also find peaches and pears and a haunting of cream in the nose. More of this happens in the mouth, with the aforementioned ampleness of body.

Compared to other Spanish whites with which you're probably familiar (Albariño, Verdejo . . .) this Rioja Blanco is lower in acidic "spine" and bigger in mouthfeel. It therefore makes for a great cold weather white, accommodating heavier dishes such as pasta with rich cream sauces (plus pancetta!), or even pork chops.

Appreciate this rare white seeing its very first importation into the United States and know you're not alone in your admiration: Renowned wine reviewer James Suckling awarded it no less than 92 points!

15.99 / 14.39 for all wine club members



You can and should meet 'Joan,' an exuberant Terra Alta advocate!

From the Original Source!

2017 EDETARIA 'Via Terra' GARNACHA BLANCA – Terra Alta, Spain

So many of you are heading for Barcelona these days. For the requisite wine tasting trip many will hop on the local train and find yourselves in Cava Country in just a half hour. That's a nice visit, but I can tell you that there is far more to experience if you can rent a car and devote a whole day to venture a little further. Priorat and its southern neighbor Terra Alta will impress you, I promise!

This white wine comes from the latter place, the lesser-known land of Terra Alta. Higher in elevation than Priorat as its name implies, Terra Alta works especially with the Grenache / Garnacha / Garnatxa grape. It is also the place where – we're told – that red variety first mutated to Grenache Blanc. While the white Garnacha / Grenache now appears in other parts of Spain, the south of France, and parts of California (I firmly believe in its Livermore Valley possibilities) Terra Alta remains its most devoted caretaker with the most acreage.

Unlike Viognier and Sauvignon Blanc and other aromatic extroverts, Grenache Blanc declares its actual scents and flavors more discreetly with white flower, citrus, and white stone fruit insinuations. It's a "feel" wine more than a "flavor" wine. Even in this entry-level version from Edetaria we indulge in a melon-y textural lushness, even if we taste no actual melons. It is texture that especially factors in to food pairing choices, and I can promise you that the body of this wine will accommodate a lot of plates. Charcuterie including prosciutto is one. Turkey or pork tenderloin: Look out! Fatty white fish like halibut? You're in trouble!!

At this writing we are pleased to report the new publication of a Wine Spectator review applauding this "innocent" white with a 91 point rating. I couldn't be more happy for Edetaria, whom I visited just three months ago. I'm also ecstatic that a rarely-mentioned yet deserving grape just got the time of day!

16.99 / 15.29 for all wine club members

The Wine Steward's

Tuesday Night

WINE CLUB

November 2018

Rare Success with a Troublesome Wine Type

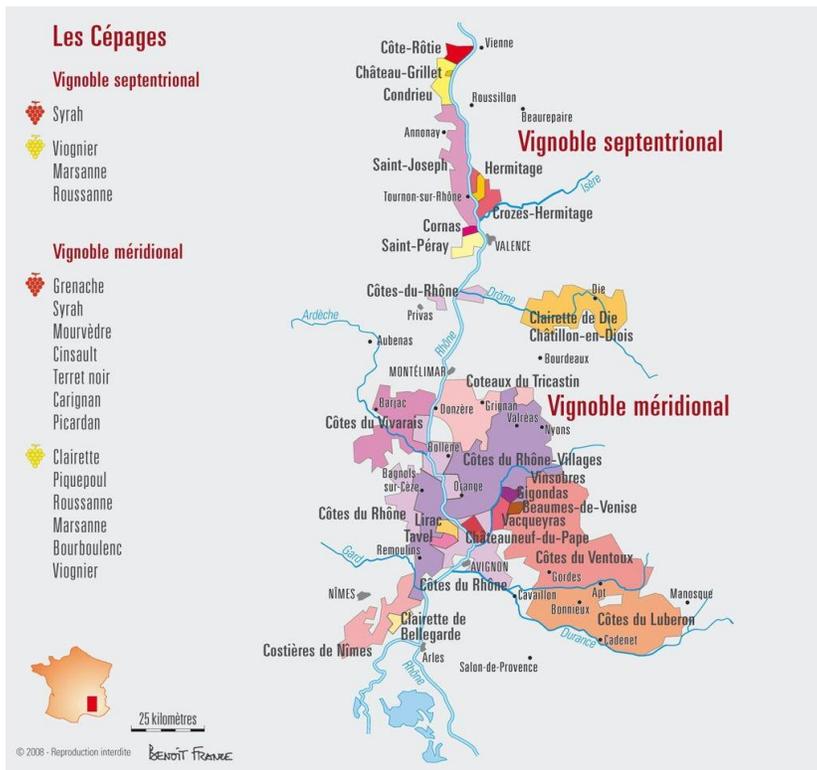
2016 HONORO VERA MONASTRELL – Jumilla, Spain

Monastrell is the same as Mourvèdre, and there's nothing wrong with either except that in this warmer part of southeast Spain the grape can give you TOO MUCH of a good thing, especially in bargain renditions such as this. Upon tasting Honoro Vera, however, I was impressed with the anticipated indulgence being tempered by just enough restraint to keep more of you engaged. In other words, this wine is big AND knows when to quit.

The nose is resplendent with cherries, autumn leaf pile, damp cigar wrapper, and chocolate. The mouth is full in body yet respectful with the streamlining of lithe acidity. There is no sense of the sickening almost-sweetness often happening in bargain Monastrell. Instead of overstaying its welcome on your palate, it politely vacates with a fond black pepper and dried herb farewell.

I would not hesitate to uncork multiple bottles of this inexpensive value at any party venue. The guzzling consumer will enjoy having his or her bill filled, while the occasional, more thoughtful wine sipper will certainly compliment you on your discovery – courtesy of The Wine Steward!

10.99 / 9.89 for wine club members



Better Wines Challenge You More

2016 BIELER Père & Fils ‘La Jassine’ – Cotes du Rhone Villages, France

Everything about this wine – the location, the fragrance, color, body, complexity... – is better than that of its peers in the price range because ‘Bieler’ is a 2016. That year Mother Nature blessed the Rhone with the climatic circumstances for wine perfection, or as close as a vintage can get to it. Whether \$10 or \$100 examples, the 2016 Rhones are darker, more densely-fruited, and more durable than their counterparts from other years.

The only drawback is probably confronting your curious nose at the moment: Reduction. This wine, in its youth and right at uncorking, is a bit smelly. That’s because there is so more than the usual wine goodness squeezed into your bottle that it needs either a year of aging or a fifteen minute decanting to unwind, expand, and blow off the smells of “cramped quarters.” I opened the bottle before me last night, showed it to a friend right then, and the reaction to the aroma was a negative “Whoof!!” “Wave it around for five minutes,” I admonished, and – sure enough – the sulfuric funk began to ease, revealing the real aromatic purpose. I intentionally saved some for today and – 20 hours later – the funk is mostly yielding to licorice, charcoal, and lavender . . . and the mouth emphasizes boysenberries.

This is yet another wine we’re ecstatic to sell yet reluctant to show to YOUR club, because many Tuesday Night Wine Club members won’t read their notes. That’s not a judgement, but a mere fact of lower investment. – And yet many of you WILL be reading this, so . . . KNOW THAT THIS WINE IS IMPORTANT – AND MORE IMPORTANT THAN OUR USUAL PROVISION. Important wines need some communication from us and understanding and participation from you. If all that happens, you’re sure to appreciate this great Cotes du Rhone. Decant this wine if you’re opening it soon. Enjoy it with lamb. Come back for more of this great 2016 and age a few bottles for a year or two. There, you read it!

13.49 / 12.14 for wine club members